

Creese, A. & Martin, P. (Eds.) (2003)
Multilingual Classroom Ecologies.
Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

'Multilingual Classroom Ecologies' follows the standard format for a collection of academic papers. Each paper sets out the author's focus and theoretical perspective, refers to relevant literature, summarises the research methodology, presents some data with any necessary contextual information, discusses the significance of the data presented and draws conclusions. Most papers draw on data from a wider study. In the case of this collection, papers from eight research studies make up the chapters, with introductory and final chapters intended to provide an overview and draw the various chapters together .

The idea of 'language ecology', suggested in the title of this book, indicates the concept which the varied studies presented have in common. An ecological perspective takes into account not only the inter-relationships between languages used in classrooms, but also their relationship to the society in which they are practised. Thus language use may be related to the geographical, socio-economic and cultural situations of speakers and also to the influence of socio-political, economic, and ideological factors in society. The opening chapter discusses the concept of 'linguistic ecology' and outlines the structure of the collection of papers.

Four of the eight studies presented are drawn from classroom contexts in England. Jo Arthur's chapter on Somali literacy teaching in Liverpool is a fascinating case study which sets a discussion of bilingual classroom talk of students in an after-school class taught by two members of the Somali community against the wider local and historic community context. What emerges is not only the significance of the use of languages in the classroom extracts presented, but also the significance of the class itself – the rationale for way it was formed, the approach to teaching and, indeed, the fact that it exists. Beyond this, there is its significance in the local Somali community, which is related to socio-economic and educational experience; there is the pupils' experience of mainstream education: and, as part of the context which helps us to understand the significance of what is taking place in the classroom, there is the migration of refugees from a civil war in 1988 and two key aspects of the Somali language: the strength of oral traditions and the fact that the introduction of a writing system for Somali took place as recently as 1972. All these factors are in play in the discussion. They are relevant, clear, coherent. They provide a complex and informative

picture of both the value and the fragility of the Somali language in this particular context. The students in the study have 'limited active use of Somali' but 'they express a strong sense of symbolic attachment to it'. The literacy class described is called 'Baro Afkaaga Hooyo!' which means, 'Learn (or study) your language (or your mother tongue)'.

The legitimacy given to English (by bilingual students as well as by national policy) as opposed to the tenuous position of community languages forms part of Arthur's account of Somali in Liverpool. This theme is central to Deirdre Martin's discussion of the way Panjabi Sikh pupils position themselves in their language use. The data is drawn from group interviews with ten Year 6 pupils. The theoretical approach adopted by Martin draws in particular on Bourdieu's constructs of linguistic and cultural capital and his notion of 'habitus' (which might be thought of as the ideas and dispositions that limit a person's actions). The discussion of what the children say in their interviews is related to the way that the use of English and Panjabi may be managed to contest or collude with the structures of language and power in school. A range of positions are expressed. For instance, formal Panjabi may be rejected in favour of informal learning in social contexts: 'you don't need to go to Panjabi school to learn Panjabi, people around you can teach you' (p.84). Some of the children used Panjabi consistently in the home while others might only use it with grandparents. Some saw advantages in learning literacy skills and thought that there would be benefits in getting a better job or in being able to communicate with other Panjabi Sikh communities. At the same time, some members of the local community do not maintain the Panjabi language. In school, Panjabi is not used in the classroom in the teacher's hearing – 'I'm disallowed so'. But 'when the teacher is out of the classroom I speak Panjabi' (p.84). In such circumstances, interestingly, a gender difference is suggested in that the girls say that they might use Panjabi to establish order (the boys don't listen to 'shut up' in English but they do take notice in Panjabi!). The girls seem to believe that Panjabi would not help them with, for example, problem solving in the classroom. They appeared to have a construct which disengaged Panjabi from learning. The boys, on the other hand, said that they did talk together in Panjabi to help solve problems. However, they also had the idea that their teacher might think they were cheating. Thus, they seemed to be living with a tension between what is legitimised in school (English) and how they contested this in their use of Panjabi. Martin concludes that the boys use 'their non-legitimate language subversively in school' whereas the girls

'contest English and construct spaces for using Panjabi' (p.90) in a different way. By contrast, in the different contexts of the home and community, the children construct themselves as 'facilitators'. In both home and school settings, their bilingualism enables them to engage with choices.

The two chapters outlined seek to account for complex situated conditions and Angela Creese's chapter is no different. However, its subject adds considerably to the variety of situations addressed in the book. Creese's key data are public statements by two groups of students in a secondary school about alleged racism. One group was involved in a demonstration while the other group was reacting to this. She explores this school event in terms of the different discourses of the students and the school leadership and staff. Interesting, the event causes a temporary change in the knowledge hierarchy in the school since knowledge of the community language becomes vital to managing the whole situation and the two bilingual members of staff are central to this process. This is fascinating territory which exposes the different positions of school and staff, groups of bilingual students, and bilingual staff in a way which many teachers of EAL will recognise. There is a particularly interesting discussion of how they position themselves and are positioned. The point is made that from the headteacher's point of view their 'language as a resource to communicate the school's agenda was paramount' (p.72) while their different cultural, social and political affiliations from the students is disregarded. From this we can make a connection to a central argument in the paper since although the students share Turkish as a common language, three quite different cultural and historical backgrounds are involved. The discourse of equality of opportunity, as expressed by the school, predominated, but Creese draws attention to the dangers of divorcing language from cultural affiliations, and argues the need to recognise difference rather than sameness. She concludes: 'Perhaps it is equity that should be the starting point rather than equality'. (p.75)

Bilingual staff provide the focus for Marilyn Martin-Jones and Mukul Saxena's chapter. Against the background of the recommendations of the Swann Report (1985) (which rejected the teaching of community languages in mainstream schools but discussed the idea of a 'bilingual resource' to help with the 'transitional needs' of bilingual children), the authors provide examples of ways in which three bilingual assistants use their linguistic repertoire (in this case Panjabi, Urdu and English) with young children in reception classes. Three main aspects of language use are considered. Firstly there is evidence of switching between Panjabi and Urdu to accommodate the children's

language preferences; secondly, the bilingual assistants use culturally-specific cues, mainly ones that signalled closeness and endearment; thirdly transcripts of bilingual teaching/learning events help to show how they are able to make links with the children's home and community experience. Although the data is drawn from research carried out some years ago, conditions for many bilingual teaching assistants have not greatly changed and the discussion of the data presented is certainly relevant today and valuable, particularly because there has been a dearth of research interest in the work of bilingual staff.

The position of bilingual staff in schools can be complex since the school may be wholly dependent on their language skills in particular situations (as Creese shows), they have to position themselves in relation to multiple perspectives and, at the same time, they have minimal authority in terms of the structures of power in the school. Sally Boyd's paper provides a different perspective on this issue. She examines attitudes to 'foreign' accent in multilingual classrooms in Sweden. The results of the study in which she was involved indicate that deviations in pronunciation influence judgements about other aspects of language proficiency (for instance, precision and variation of word choice and grammatical correctness). Moreover, these judgements are generalised to apply to professional competence. Boyd concludes that judgements of accentedness play an important role in the exclusion of foreigners from qualified employment, including in Swedish schools. She also suggests that far more time should be spent on pronunciation in second language classrooms.

Two further chapters examine aspects of interactions around text. In both cases we see the language/s at issue in the unique circumstances of their socio-political situation. One context is Brunei where the local variety of Malay and English are used in the bilingual education system. However in the area of Brunei described there are three local ethnic groups each with their own language. The paper focuses on reading practices in the classroom using data to illustrate multilingual talk about monolingual text. The second context is Corsica where, after quite a long struggle, bilingual education has been established in schools since 1996. The children are largely French-dominant and one of the goals is to foster their sense of cultural ownership of the Corsican language. A parallel goal is to establish parity between French and Corsican. The author, Allexandra Jaffe, relates classroom literacy practices (through 8 excerpts from transcripts of classroom interaction) to this wider agenda and compares the differences in teaching the two languages.

The chapter by Jaffe shows how teachers make micro decisions in relation to implementing national language policy in the classroom. In the case of Ellen Skilton-Sylvester's chapter, which is about the impact of policy on Khmer speakers in the US (Philadelphia), policy has legal force. The analysis offered by the author highlights not just that statute influences the realities of school but also the way that the legal discourse comes to be absorbed by teachers and students, and (because national and state laws do not mandate native language instruction) legitimises commonplace assumptions about assimilation and subtractive bilingualism. However, a central focus of this chapter is the importance of the policy adopted by the teacher: 'Much of language teaching can also be seen as language policymaking.' (p.14) The beliefs and classroom practice of four teachers are described revealing the value they place on Khmer. The author argues that Khmer language is intrinsically related to what it means to be Cambodian and that asking parents to choose between English and Khmer violates their linguistic and social rights.

Nancy Hornberger provides a final chapter which offers a commentary on the common themes in the book and returns to the notion of language ecology discussed in the introduction. Reading through all the chapters in this book one becomes aware of the delicate balance between language use / survival in particular settings and the influence of state policy – including in England. The fact is, as Skilton-Sylvester's paper highlights, all educators of bilingual children, as well as policy-makers at different levels, are implicated in the inter-relationship between policy and practice. This collection of papers is valuable for showing, in very specific contexts, how bilingual teaching and learning works, how teachers and pupils position themselves through their language use, and what the inter-relationship is between policy and practice.

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